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Jottings from June: September 1, 2016

I am mindful as I compose this message of the approaching 15th anniversary of September 11, 2001. Most of us will recall where we were when we heard the news of the horror and destruction that befell so many on that day, similar to an earlier generation who recall where they were when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. These are societal and cultural markers that define an era and the characteristics of future generations.

Change is a constant in our lives and that change is often brought about by some traumatic event. We are a nation that is increasingly diagnosed and suffering from the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder. Medical professionals and therapists and scientists are understanding more about life events that dispose us toward this kind of stress reaction. And our churches are not immune to this.

One of the conversations I seem to be having repeatedly in the past few weeks is about patterns of behavior in congregations. I share a story about a youth retreat model I developed that asked the young people to study the scripture about the house built on the sand and on the rock. (Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:46-49). Then we did a review of earth sciences and about the three kinds of rocks and how they are formed (igneous, metamorphic, sedimentary). Then I asked the young people to reflect on and share what kind of foundation that their local church was built upon. Almost universally, these young people were able to identify that there had been times of great upheaval or change in their history that shaped that foundation. Adults were generally surprised as the events had often happened years before, certainly before the active participation of these young people in the life of the church.

What I pointed out to those adults, and now point out to churches who are in search of a new pastor or experiencing some kind of change or upheaval in their life together, is that we learn patterns of engagement, behavior, and relationship that emerge from our response to that metamorphic or fiery event. And we continue to practice those patterns long after the event is past or the situation resolved. It is unconscious and we pass that along to following generations and those new to our communities of faith as normative behavior. And that goes for those sedimentary churches also where nothing much changes as their stories and history get laid down day to day.

The key here, in this time of change and upheaval and uncertainty, is to be aware of our response to what is going on and to reflect on how appropriate that response is to the situation at hand. Perhaps we need to learn or recall other ways of engaging one another and responding to the environment around us. And that does require checking in with others who are a part of that same house and those patterns of community and personal engagement.

I pray you will consider my words and commend to you the epistle text from this past Sunday's lectionary. *Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* (Hebrews 13:7-8)

‹ Errand in the Wilderness: Congregationalism in Appalachia

Caring Community: September 1, 2016 ›

Upcoming Events

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Mon
(http://www.secucc.org/news-and-events/calendar/action~oneday/exact_date~

all-day Retired Servants Retreat @ Blowing Rock Retreat Center (http://www.secucc.org/event/retired-servants-retreat/?instance_id=141493)